

THE LOST PROVINCES.

How Vansittart Came Back to France.

By Louis Tracy.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

The March of the Motor Cars.

When the German emperor crossed the Meuse near Namur, he headed a superb army of 100,000 veterans infantry, 30,000 cavalry mounted on hardy and powerful Westphalian horses, and 300 guns.

In physique, equipment and stamina, in every soldierly quality to endure and to accomplish, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to surpass throughout the world this splendid expeditionary force.

Vansittart, even if he were restored to health, was hopelessly blockaded to the north and east by Kreuznach and the army of Metz. If he attempted to fall back toward Paris he laid bare his extended flank and line of march to disastrous attack. If he marched southward he would be hard pressed in pursuit, and could do nothing to resist the Kaiser.

In a word, the road to Paris lay open, defended only by the garrison of Chalons, which Wilhelm could swallow during the course of the ordinary day's routine.

The distance to be traversed was 130 miles, and the emperor told his troops that he expected them to bivouac in the forest of Bondy, on the outskirts of Paris, at the end of the sixth day.

In mere statement this task, to the trained military mind, seems almost impossible. The movement of an army numbering 150,000 fighting men, with the vast array of commissariat, medical and other subsidiary services, at the rate of nearly twenty-two miles each day, has never yet been effected over anything like the distance stated.

But the clockwork accuracy of the German machine manifests itself with telling force precisely in such a stupendous undertaking.

But the great coup that the German emperor evolved in the hotel de Ville at Metz, when he heard of the ineffectual Paris commune had, strangely enough been foreseen and discounted by Vansittart before he left New York.

It will be remembered that Jerome had set in motion an expenditure of nearly twenty millions sterling before he sailed in the Sefarim. Much of this vast sum had gone in the immediate purchase of a great variety of stores and animals, in which he knew the French defenses to be seriously deficient; but a huge sum was devoted towards the construction and equipment of motor cars solely designed for the rapid transport of troops across country by means of ordinary roads.

In the United States a tremendous development had been given to internal traffic of a heavy nature by the adoption of motor traction. The quick-witted American manufacturers soon saw that the horse would never be displaced of conveyance by the pleasure-loving public. It was quite a different thing where the haulage of goods was concerned. Here was the true future of the horseless carriage, and the result of a general activity in this direction enabled the millionaire to readily and promptly secure the multitude of motors he required.

So secretly and efficiently had his agents worked that large consignments of the road engines were shipped from the states and landed at Toulon without public notice being directed to the event.

Meanwhile the artificers of Lyons and other metallurgical centers in the south of France were busily engaged in constructing the carriages intended to be used in conjunction with the motors.

As the vehicles will figure largely in the history of the forthcoming operations, it will serve to elucidate matters if they are described with some degree of minuteness. The engines were compact, extremely powerful, and so simply and strongly designed as to be capable of withstanding rough usage. Small, broad-tired running wheels, with seven clear feet of axle width, gave ample margin for security in rapid running over roads of steep gradient. They were capable of drawing a load of forty tons at an average rate of twelve miles an hour, whilst on level straight roads, and for short distances, this rate of progress could be greatly exceeded.

They were protected by plates of tough steel fixed at reclining angles, and it was estimated that even artillery fire, unless exceptionally accurate, would fail to do them material damage by isolated hits. Against musketry they were practically impregnable. The motive power was petrol, fused to a high explosive temperature by intermixture with a small jet of steam generated by a tiny subsidiary boiler, and it was possible to carry sufficient fuel to last for a run of 150 miles without replenishment.

Each engine drew two cars, similarly armored and running on bogies, whilst a marvelously effective set of spiral buffers gave cohesion and stability to the resistance to the whole turnout, even when traveling very rapidly. Each of these cars accommodated, at a squeeze, thirty men, or eight horses, besides carrying rations and forage, whilst in every set of ten was fitted for the conveyance of two guns without ladders, the recoil being absorbed on the quick-firing principle.

At the very moment when Vansittart received ample assurance from the Lyons arsenal authorities that motor-car carriage for 100,000 men was available for immediate delivery, he received the news of the German emperor's march on Paris.

Acting with his accustomed rapid and final decision, Vansittart ordered the mobilization of the motor car army at Vitry. He chose this town as being south of the German line of march and consequently liable to sudden attack.

He ordered the general commanding at

Chalons to throw his whole force in the way of the emperor and to deny him as much as possible, but on no account to destroy bridges or tear up roads, even if retreat became thereby imperative.

Above and beyond every other consideration the French cavalry must keep the Germans from scouting to the south of Chalons, else they would infallibly discover the preparations made at Vitry.

Vansittart, in his own mind, fixed upon Rheims as the probable scene of conflict between himself and the Kaiser, and, as a matter of fact, the subsequent battle centered round Verzy, a village only ten miles to the southeast of that historic city.

This position of decision he threw himself into the mass of details necessary for the mobilization at Vitry, at twenty-four hours' notice, of the 100,000 troops selected for the enterprise and the strange means of locomotion which they were to use for the first time in warfare.

The Chalons garrison had been driven from the hill country in the neighborhood of the two villages, Le Grand and Le Petit Mourmelon, situated midway between Rheims and Chalons.

A glance at the map of this part of France shows that the hamlet of Verzy lies eight miles due west of Little Mourmelon, on the slopes of the famous champagne country, and in direct line between the German bivouacs and Paris.

Late into the night did Vansittart and his principal officers examine every topographical detail of the locality, falling back upon personal knowledge of residents in Chalons where the excellent maps in their possession seemed in any degree vague or misleading.

The most pressing immediate difficulty was to contrive to hold back the expected German assault upon Chalons, while not permitting matters so seriously as to compel the Kaiser's main body to turn from its obvious route next morning.

Vansittart entrusted this task to the engineers. Before midnight he received the assurance that field works were in course of construction to an extent that would easily enable the Chalons garrison to beat off their assailants until late next day, by which time the millionaire promised them active help.

The motor car army was divided into ten strong brigades of 100 trains each, thus constituting 6,000 men per brigade. With these there were no field pieces and but few Maxim's. It was purely an infantry force, and each brigade had its line of operations strictly marked out, beyond which it was not to deviate a yard.

The artillery was massed in two divisions, which, with motor car infantry escort and a considerable force of cavalry, were intended to be used principally along the front of the motor car army.

At 10 o'clock the motor car army, which, north and south through the position which it was expected, the Kaiser's army would occupy about 10 o'clock.

Soon after dawn some intermittent firing to the north announced that the Uhlans scouts were endeavoring to drive in the French cavalry outposts.

They did not accomplish their object, but the French horsemen were handled so carefully that they gave no sign of the presence of an army in their rear.

Soon, too, these minor conflicts were drowned in the sustained roar of the expected German assault on the outskirts of Chalons, and the motor car army was left to its own devices.

By 7 o'clock the French pickets brought definite news of the German advance guard being in possession of the heights beyond Verzy to the west.

At 8 o'clock Montsalvo led a cavalry reconnaissance in that direction, and distinctly saw the German columns, filing down the slopes leading to the village. But the alert German staff noted the unwelcome assiduity of the French mounted patrols, and the appearance of Montsalvo and his troops led to a counter reconnaissance by a field battery and two regiments of Uhlans.

This compact little body rode forward so gallantly that it was necessary to stop them by some display of force. They would not retire until several guns opened fire on them, and a French cavalry brigade galloped out in the hope of cutting them off.

The Kaiser would not believe that any notable opposition could be expected from this quarter, but the symptoms were so dangerous that he unwillingly ordered a general halt, whilst two brigades of infantry, supported by four batteries and 3,000 sabers, marched south to dispel the mystery that hung about the proceedings on the German left flank.

It took a good hour for this opening phase of the battle to develop, and the Hanoverian infantry, beautifully handled, and maneuvering with faultless efficiency, pressed the attack right up to the banks of the Marne, and did not retire until crushed by a vastly superior French force.

At 10 o'clock the motor car army, which was alive with the Kaiser's troops. Batteries of artillery were taking up position at the verge of a plateau beyond the Marne, and shells were screaming through the air in every direction where a body of infantry or cavalry could be discerned by the German guards.

The supreme moment of action had arrived. Vansittart simply waved his hand to Le Breton, who commanded the leading force, and the motor car army moved forward, the first of the motor cars, and the vehicle moved slowly to the front. Quickly getting under way, the motor car army moved forward, the first of the motor cars, and the vehicle moved slowly to the front. Quickly getting under way, the motor car army moved forward, the first of the motor cars, and the vehicle moved slowly to the front.

Five other brigades stationed across the Marne, but near to Chalons, started almost simultaneously within ten minutes from the time of Vansittart's quiet signal, and, containing 26,000 soldiers, were rushing toward the German columns at a pace exceeding twelve miles an hour, or more rapidly than a similarly large force of cavalry could possibly get over the ground.

The Kaiser and his staff had ridden to the crest of the ridge, where the German guns were at work, and were momentarily expecting the bold stand so far made by the French to wither before the vigorous assault now in progress, when the first of the motor cars, with its two attached carriages, dashed in sight across the Marne.

"What on earth is that?" cried Wilhelm with field glasses glued to his eyes. "A running steam engine!" laughed an aide.

"A charge by the commissariat!" "Perhaps a new sort of military steam roller!" "Whatever it is, it is full of soldiers!" "With a machine gun!" "Another of Vansittart's dodges, eh?"

The concluding comment drew the emperor. "If he be one of Vansittart's dodges, gentlemen, it will need all our skill to counteract it!"

In silence the distinguished officers present steadily watched the progress of the motor.

With even keener interest Vansittart and those near him watched it, for they alone knew what was expected of this new and terrible engine of warfare.

Almost before a shot was fired at it the motor was within 200 yards of the advanced firing line. The officer in command of a scattered company, seeing this strange object rapidly darting toward him from the French position, realized that whatever its powers, it must have hostile intent. So he ordered his men to fire a volley at it.

Several bullets struck the motor and the cars with resounding clang, but the angle of impact was so acute that the missiles glanced off harmlessly.

And now the Frenchmen commenced firing in return, wildly, it is true, owing to the impossibility of taking accurate aim, but several Germans dropped.

It was different when, with tremendous clatter, and amidst clouds of whirling dust, the motor swept through the fighting line and the motor, to come within short range of a couple of battalions drawn up in close order.

Here the French fire began to tell with awful effect. The machine gun, mounted on the left front of the leading car, poured a torrent of projectiles into the German ranks, and, as it passed them on the flank, had a destructive influence which could never be obtained under ordinary conditions.

The leaden shower beat upon the masses of soldiers with the directness of a rain-storm on a field of corn. Whole sections of companies were crushed to the ground, a half battalion was demoralized in a few seconds.

A company of infantry stood on the roadway itself. The men bravely emptied their magazines at the steel-clad monster rushing towards them with the speed of a train. Then they realized that in another instant the thundering, crashing motor would be upon them. Human nature could not withstand this modern car of juggernaut. Officers and men rushed dismayed to the hedges and sought to save their lives by flight.

One after another the German structures came panting up the slope, each splitting fire and smoke and deadly bullets, each crammed with frantic, cheering, intoxicated French soldiers, half freezing with the consciousness of irresistible force given to them by the motor, and barely able to obey the impassioned appeals of their officers to steady themselves and fire with anything like self control into the ranks of their opponents.

The first man to comprehend the full scope of the motors in such a battle as this were now engaged in was Vansittart. He turned to his staff and said:

"Go, some of you, and warn the reserves to be in immediate readiness. Also send the Seventh and Eighth motor brigades to the assistance of Chalons. The rest is mere slaughter."

The second to grasp the situation was the German emperor. With a cry of rage he drew his sword and spurred into his horse, and wheeled the startled animal into a gallop toward the nearest batteries.

"Stop them," he roared to the artillery officers. "Stop them, or the army will become a mob."

With the utmost rapidity, half a dozen guns were swung round to the new front, and fired at the line of motors, for, although the incidents described took little more than two minutes in transaction, already some forty of Le Breton's moving forts were inside the German position.

But it is not an easy thing to train a field piece and fire with precision at even a definite point, aim low, and fire salvoes by word of command.

The artillery quickly grasped his meaning. The first volley was not successful because the officer in charge of the operations gave the word too soon. But at the second attempt four shells hit one of the motors, which was smashed to bits.

The motor, which was carrying the Kaiser and his staff, was smashed to bits, and the Kaiser and his staff were killed.

Some dozen rounds were fired before one of the cars was struck. Even then the shell only succeeded in tearing away a portion of the upper screen and killing a few of the occupants. The car swerved badly from the shock, but did not overturn, and its forward progress was in no way affected.

"Idiot!" shrieked the Kaiser. "Select a definite point, aim low, and fire salvoes by word of command!"

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The German battery, now thoroughly enfolded. Two guns were wrenched from their carriages, gunners were crushed into shapeless atoms on all sides and the emperor himself had a miraculous escape, his pickelhaube being knocked off by the wind from a passing shell.

Had he been told at that moment that Le Breton's brigade was one of six then tearing wildly through the German position from the south and west, while Beaumarchais had completed his flank march and was on the point of driving the Uhlans pickets in dismay before him from the west, it is possible that this latest action of the line of Hohenzollern would have sought immediate death on the battlefield.

As it was, the whirl and confusion of events, the eager haste and disposition to combat the present danger, shut out from him all knowledge of proceedings elsewhere.

The Frenchmen worked like fiends to remove the debris of the smashed motor. In this task they were practically unhindered, as the nearest German infantry had been brushed far from the place by the passage of the preceding cars.

Soon they had the road sufficiently cleared, the two cars were shoved off into a field, and the line of motors again resumed progress, for the German guns were so hammered by the French artillery that it was impossible to secure efficient fire for the main purpose in hand—namely, the stopping of the French advance.

In the fury of the Kaiser felt that his guns, devotedly served though they were, could not perform the task he required of them. The arrival of a small

kaizer's command, and at once sought the means to execute it. But a flag of truce is not usually carried as a part of the equipment of an imperial army corps.

From a farmhouse on the road he obtained a small white tablecloth. He was about to run his sword through the end when his nerve forsook him. With a cry of bitter rage he dashed the weapon to the ground.

Then he snatched a lance from a Uhlans orderly and rode off with his significant banner.

He did not go straight along the ridge, the most direct way to the French center, but cut across country diagonally into the advancing French cavalry and prevent the horrible massacre, for it could be sought else, which must ensue if once the horsemen got mixed up with the stricken German troops.

Fortunately, he was in time. Montsalvo, riding at the head of the leading regiment, the Eighteenth Chasseurs, caught sight of the solitary officer dashing down the hillside, and checked the order trembling on his lips which would convert a steady gallop into a charge.

As the courier of peace drew near Montsalvo recognized him. The mere fact that General von Gossler himself carried the merciful signal showed the gravity of his errand, and the French cavalry leader brought his brigade to a halt, the rest of the division pulling up in rotation as the loud command passed from squadron to squadron.

When the two officers met von Gossler begged the other to conduct him at once to Vansittart, and to delay the advance of the French cavalry until the pour-parlers had taken place.

Montsalvo felt that he assumed a grave responsibility, but he was assured that the kindly-hearted American would sanction a proposal intended to prevent useless bloodshed.

Leaving instructions with his second in command to forthwith resume the charge if any manifestly hostile move were made by the enemy, he accompanied von Gossler toward the place where he had last seen the millionaire.

But Vansittart, too, had noticed the flag of truce, and the sudden halt of the French cavalry.

Before the envoy had traveled 100 yards, with his escort, Jerome rode up, followed by every officer who could invent the slightest pretext for accompanying him.

Attired in a simple tweed coat, riding breeches and boots, with a broad-brimmed felt to shield his eyes from the sun, and carrying no more offensive weapon than a riding whip, Vansittart sat gracefully the powerful charger that bore him on this short, but eventful journey, quietly acknowledging the vociferous plaudits of his gallant troops as he passed.

"I am commissioned by his majesty, the German emperor, to ask you to meet him in the village of Verzy, and arrange terms of surrender," said von Gossler when he drew near the spot where Vansittart halted.

Jerome bowed, but before he could reply the German officer continued:

"In view of an immediate and peaceful settlement, I venture to ask General Montsalvo to defer the cavalry charge he was conducting, and which could only achieve the useless butchery of our demoralized men."

"General Montsalvo will well accede to your humane wishes," said Vansittart. "But I cannot meet the German emperor immediately, as I am utterly defeated. It would be needless cruelty to prolong the conflict."

"Your majesty," urged von Gossler, "may I give orders for a general retreat?"

His persistence stirred Wilhelm from his stupor of grief.

"Retreat!" he cried. "Orders! Look, man! What orders are necessary? Who will listen? Who will obey?"

The sight so unmoved the emperor that he bowed his head and cried repeatedly, "My poor lads! my poor lads!" whilst unchecked tears streamed from his eyes.

"Yet, your majesty," persisted the aide. "We may do something. Let us at least try."

As if in answer to this despairing utterance came the sound of sustained firing from the north and west.

Beaumarchais' division was speeding along the only possible line of retreat.

The Kaiser saw and made no reply to von Gossler. He looked toward, to see a French cavalry division ride furiously into the valley from the south, intent upon completing the ruthless work so fearfully cut out for them by the motors, from which, too, long lines of infantry, fresh as though drawn up for parade inspection, were beginning to emerge.

Then he answered. Forcing out the words with desperate calmness, he said:

"Yes, von Gossler, we can do something. We can stop useless butchery. Go with a flag of truce to Vansittart. Tell him I will meet him in the village here!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Jerome and Wilhelm.

The German chief of staff was far too good a soldier not to know when the game was up.

partments. His sword and sabre were parted obstinately against a chair.

For an awkward moment there was silence.

Then von Gossler spoke. "This is M. Vansittart, your majesty," he said. "As an afterthought he added: 'Permit me also to announce the king of France.'"

The Kaiser inclined his head. "I am at a loss," he said, with even, metallic accents, "to know whether to present my sword to the king or to the man who makes and un-makes kings."

"To the king!" said Vansittart, whereupon Wilhelm handed his sword to Henri, who gravely received it.

"And now tell me your resolves, monsieur," the Kaiser turned and looked Vansittart squarely in the eyes.

"I am here for that purpose. They are brief and to the point. I require the prompt capitulation of the German forces now stationed west of the Rhine, when, after the requisite formalities, all officers and men will be at once free to return to their homes. I also require you to sign a treaty of peace leaving the delimitation of the frontier between France and Germany to the mayors of twelve French and German towns, six to be nominated by you and six by me. These towns will be named, in addition, to devise such means as they think fit to prevent further trouble in regard to frontier affairs, both countries binding themselves to accept such recommendations without cavil or complaint."

"I will no longer leave the question to you, but to your people and parliament."

The reply staggered the emperor. Such a course of procedure meant the disappearance of the house of Hohenzollern. The pallor returned to his cheeks as he said:

"In the name of the saints, my mayors?" "Because it may be fairly assumed that they represent the mass of the people, without whose taxes and military service it would be impossible for such as you to plunge peacefully-disposed nations into the horrors of war."

The Kaiser swept aside this all-sufficient answer. With intense bitterness of tone he said, turning to his staff: "You hear, gentlemen! This is the first installment. The second will doubtless deal with indemnity."

Vansittart produced a cigar case, cut the end off a cigar, and lit it, before he said, with the utmost coolness:

"There will be no indemnity. God forbid that I should fine your unfortunate people because of your blunders."

"You are a marvelous man, M. Vansittart!" Jerome, irritated slightly by the Kaiser's stiffness, merely nodded his appreciation of the compliment.

Wilhelm had perforce to continue the conversation. "Notwithstanding your last remarkable concession, M. Vansittart, I cannot accept your terms. It is impossible that the emperor of Germany should consent to expose any part of his dominions to the bartering of a set of provincial mayors, excellent though these gentlemen may be."

"You forget that France likewise submits to their arbitraments. I should have the utmost faith in their collective good sense."

"Pooh! It is out of the question." The millionaire picked up his hat and riding whip, which he had placed on a chair.

"Then further discussion is unnecessary," he said. "Have I your majesty's word that neither you nor the members of your staff present will attempt to escape? Or must I place you under restraint?"

The Kaiser flared out again into animation. "It is matterless to me what you do. My unbroken troops still hold the field, in French territory, too. I will pay the full price of my transgressions. I abdicate in favor of my son. My brother, Prince Henry of Prussia, will carry on the campaign, and maybe yet crush your proteges and dispossess your magniloquent theories."

From the German officers came murmurs of indignation, showing how they chafed at the situation.

Jerome directly addressed them. "So," he said, "you share your headstrong leader's view? You still hold your opponents in such feeble esteem that you believe your armies in Lorraine to be superior to circumstances. Let me deceive you. To-day your expedition, consisting presumably of your picked troops, was beaten by less than half its numbers. Only one-third of my men were in the field when you were hopelessly crippled. You have seen the value of the motors in action, and I tell you emphatically that if my demands are not acceded to fully within the hour all my available forces will march tonight for the frontier. Tomorrow General Kreuznach will be asked to defeat the same combination that you have already found irresistible. What will be the result?"

The two men were but a couple of paces apart during this impassioned speech. The stubborn Saxon nature in each shone from their resolute blue eyes. Wilhelm's attitude showed that if the vital issues before them could be determined by strangling his opponent he would gladly make the attempt—Vansittart's, that he entertained profound contempt for a monarch who cared little if he brought his country to degradation in order to gratify his personal pride.

A sudden commotion drew all eyes to the door, where the valet, in a white dress, revealing a German side-decamp, was ineffectually heaving the giant grip of Arizona Jim.

"A telegram for you, guv'nor," yelled Bates.

Jerome read the telegram and handed it to the Kaiser, saying: "Possibly this may influence your decision."

The emperor disdainfully took the little bit of flimsy. He read its contents twice before he seemed to fully comprehend their purpose. Then his customary pallid complexion assumed an ashen hue. He visibly trembled. Even his white shock as he murmured, "Can this be true?"

"On my honor," said Vansittart, "I have no reason to doubt its accuracy."

Wilhelm dropped listlessly into a chair, to bury his face in his hands—the slanting rays of the sinking sun, striking in patches through the low of the room, showed great drops of perspiration glistening on his forehead.

"I will read it aloud," said Vansittart. And this is what he read:

"Metz is ours. The tricolor flags again above its walls. Without our attack on Kreuznach was developing. I formed a column for the assault of Metz, and carried position after position with astounding ease. The gallant troops of France would not be gained. Fighting in outskirts still proceeding, but we are firmly established in the town itself, and in the forts to west and south. Kreuznach will probably make desperate efforts to recapture Metz, but I am confident of ability to hold him off, pending further orders. Have just heard of your great victory. Most hearty congratulations. DABRISON."

Not even German military decorum could withstand this momentous news. The staff

They were received by von Gossler, who forthwith conducted them to a room on the ground floor, for the first time, Vansittart and Wilhelm were face to face.

The emperor stood in the center of the apartment, dignified and impressive, with his hands behind his back. His face was rigid, and although tanned by exposure, its dull pallor betrayed the agonized hours he had endured since the morning. Behind him, in compliance with Vansittart's request, were ranged the division officers of his army and the heads of the military de-

partments. His sword and sabre were parted obstinately against a chair.

For an awkward moment there was silence.